I

BENEVOLENCE, CHARITY, AND PHILANTHROPY

REMARKING ON his travels in the Ottoman Empire in the first decades of the nineteenth century, the Englishman Thomas Thornton described how Islam was imbued with a genuine spirit of piety and noted that as a religion it was best characterized by its acts of public utility.[1] Thornton was impressed by the benevolent works he saw all around him: the fountains that provided clean water to townspeople and villagers, the stately mosques in the capital, Istanbul, and the care and respect that he saw neighbors and strangers express for one another. The sum of all that Thornton noticed was Islamic society's ideal imperative to take care of its members.

This introductory chapter explores the structures that existed to provide for the poor in Islamic societies, beginning with an overview of the avenues of care that the poor could pursue. It then turns to a discussion of some of the silences in contemporary scholarship on Middle East poor relief and illustrates how transformations in early-nineteenth-century Egypt and the resulting documentation on this era and subsequent decades provide us with important new insights on state involvement in poor relief. The chapter concludes with a methodological and theoretical discussion to highlight the ways in which this book — exploring the new attitudes, new policies, and new actors in the field of poor relief — gains from and complements our understanding of poor relief in the context of the Middle East, North America, and Europe.

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Ihsan (beneficence, generosity) and *sadaqa* (almsgiving) are core features of Islamic societies. In addition to the requirement that Muslims pay an alms tax (*zakat*), the Quran and the Hadith (sayings and actions attributed to the prophet Muhammad) frequently call on the believers to care for the needy among their members. Although *charity* has connotations specific to the Christian world, throughout this book I utilize this term and describe forms of assistance and care for the needy as "charitable acts." To better capture the meaning of *ihsan* — meaning generosity or benevolence — for an English-speaking audience, I interchange the translation of this term as "charity and benevolence." However they might be translated, the meaning of these words, as will be-

come clear, is grounded in Islamic prerogatives of caring for the needy. The opening pages of this chapter explores how a range of ideological, cultural, and physical aspects of Islamic society were intended to ensure that all of its members received care.

From birth to young adulthood, the family was the first bulwark of safety and security and the primary site of socialization. As a child matured, he or she contributed to the family's income; depending on the circumstances, marriage could mean the loss of that child's participation in the original family unit; as the parents advanced in age, children were expected to care for them.[2]

But changes throughout a person's life cycle could endanger the security and well-being of even those who had once had adequate means of support. For instance, parents relied on their children to support them in their old age, but when migration, disease, death, or natural disasters took such forms of assistance away from them, the elderly became dependent on relatives or members of their community. Women and children were particularly vulnerable to fluctuations in income and the weakening of support networks.[3] Divorce or the death of a spouse could mean that women frequently returned for assistance to their families.[4] Hence, for women, more than for men, it was imperative to stay close to networks of support.

Outside of one's immediate family, those in need of assistance could also look to their broader kin network. Relatives provided monetary assistance and training to nephews and nieces and, when necessary, took in their orphaned kin.[5] Intermarriage (cousin to cousin) enabled land and inheritances to stay in the family and ensured a solid network of support when needed.

If a person in need was without relatives or family, or if the support they provided was insufficient, she or he could next turn to the neighborhood and community. Neighbors watched out for their fellow neighbors, with richer members of the community distributing food and clothing on religious occasions. The more well off set up tables during the month of Ramadan to serve dinners marking the breaking of the fast (*iftar*) and distributed an allotment of meat and clothing to poorer families on the occasion of the Id al-Fitr (Feast of Breaking the Ramadan Fast) and Id al-Adha (Feast of Immolation). Some wealthier families even went so far as to adopt poorer families who expected, given a sense of moral economy, forms of assistance.[6] In rural areas of Turkey, through to the present, neighbors still assist nonrelatives; in previous centuries, urban areas' support provisions included guilds, which provided mutual aid to their members.[7]

Another means of receiving aid—and also a means of a livelihood—was begging. In cities such as Cairo or Istanbul, beggars were sure to

acquire at least a minimum subsistence, given the charity of these cities' inhabitants. Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, a Flemish diplomat residing in Istanbul in the sixteenth century, noted how beggars forced on passersby "a tallow candle, a lemon, or a pomegranate, for which they expect double or treble its value, that so by pretense of selling they may avoid the disgrace of asking."[8] Other beggars seemed less inhibited. At Istanbul mosques in the 1830s, Reverend Walsh saw "crowds of needy persons," to whom members of the congregation gave "liberal alms" as they entered and left.[9] Baroness Minutoli, visiting Egypt in the early 1820s, remarked that the numerous beggars of Cairo were sure to receive food from owners of shops, and in this manner they could easily survive.[10]

Since almsgiving was never intended to be ostentatious and was not a means to call attention to one's benevolence in public, documenting its practice is difficult. "Charity," noted Thornton, citing the Persian poet Jami, "was comparable to musk." Its substance, "though concealed from the sight, is discovered by the grateful odour which it diffuses."[11]

"Islamic society" in the Middle East comprised a multiethnic and multireligious civilization. Within this society, from the era of the Umayyad Dynasty through the Ottoman Empire, in a geographic sweep of territory extending from Islamic Spain to India and beyond, each religious community had the responsibility of caring for its needy.[12] To have fallen into poverty, as Mark Cohen shows in his analysis of requests for assistance by the poor found in the Cairo Geniza, brings shame to the poor person.[13] Most assuredly, to have one's religious community members visible among the "public poor," I would argue, could bring shame upon the entire community, for that meant that they proved themselves unable to protect their own members. In addition to hiding the shame-faced poor, as Abraham Marcus shows, ensuring care for the poor members of their communities was intended as protection against conversion: minority religious groups' impoverished members might be tempted to convert to escape the financial burden of their poll taxes.[14]

Family members felt a moral obligation to their needy kin, but the necessity of providing for their dependents was also due to a need to hide the impoverishment afflicting the family from people outside of the family. Since caring for one's family's destitute members was such a private matter, it is difficult to find sources delineating its practice.

A more visible means of assisting the needy, a practice utilized by private persons as well as rulers and statesmen, was the creation of religious endowments. A person creating a religious endowment designated the profits from land or other real estate (such as shops), to go toward a charitable project.[15] Since the creation of a religious endowment was both religious and contractual, written records known as

waqfiyya remain. These documents provide important information on the founder's goals in creating a religious endowment, the property that would go toward its establishment and upkeep, and detailed notes on the administration of funds. Given that many of the targets of religious endowments went toward buildings, such as mosques, schools, and even hospitals, physical evidence of this form of charity remains with us to the present day.

The most physically imposing institutions funded by religious endowments—and the most thoroughly researched structures—are those established by rulers, statesmen, and other prominent people in Islamic history. But private persons also created religious endowments. All endowments, whether established by the state or by private individuals, fulfilled a pious obligation: the founder of a religious endowment brought him- or herself closer to God by providing for the poor.

The revenues from religious endowments could be directed toward the endower's family (*waqf ahli*) as well as the community as a whole (*waqf khayri*), but all religious endowments were ultimately intended to serve the community. In this manner, they were directed toward a variety of services and institutions. The institutions funded by awqaf could be buildings such as schools, mosques, and hospitals; or they could consist of services, such as prayers on religious occasions and the distribution of food and water.[16] Given the possibility of the extinction of family lineages due to disease, infant mortality, and overall low life expectancies, even *ahli* religious endowments (endowments designating family beneficiaries first and then, ultimately, the community's poor) were likely to benefit the larger community within a few generations.[17] Private individuals frequently designated a prominent institution (such as an imperial waqf) as their ultimate beneficiary. As Miriam Hoexter has shown, a populace's trust in the sound management of a religious endowment could be measured by the number of private persons who named a larger institution (such as the Waqf al-Haramayn in Algiers) as the ultimate beneficiary of their endowments.[18]

Religious endowments served numerous personal economic ends. Theoretically, waqf property was not subject to taxation and could not be seized by the state. Designating one's heirs as beneficiaries or managers of religious endowments prevented property from being reappropriated by the state or divided up following death and enabled specific family members to profit from the endowments. Women established religious endowments so as to "safeguard their own property and its income from encroachment by their husbands and their husbands' families."[19] As Carl Petry argues, during times of economic or political instability, the designation of properties as religious endowments was intended to protect the properties from state confiscation and hence

enabled individuals such as Mamluk emirs, the military elite (the Mamluks ruled Egypt between 1250 and 1517), to not only amass large amounts of property, but also maintain this wealth after their fall from power, thus allowing them to pass on these riches to their own progeny.[20]

Institutions funded through religious endowments also benefited their founders in other ways. As Adam Sabra argues, Mamluk sultans included tombs for themselves in the institutions they funded. Those who attended the mosque — or hospital, Sufi lodge, or school — offered prayers for the founder and his descendants.[21]

The ruling elite's creation of religious endowments also served political purposes. In creating institutions for the poor, as we will see later, they drew attention to themselves as benefactors. Their cognizance of the political import of their actions is evident in the strategic placement of the institutions they established and in royal ceremonies displaying their beneficence. However, as I argue, while acknowledging the political purposes of endowments, we must not lose sight of how the creation of endowments, grounded in religion and piety, also served the needs of a society.

Imperial Forms of Assistance to the Poor

Until recently, scholars have primarily focused on how the creation of religious endowments fulfilled economic ends. However, Paula Sanders's work on the Fatimids, Adam Sabra's book on poverty and charity in Mamluk Egypt, and works on the Ottoman period by Kenneth Cuno, Halil Inalcık, Leslie Peirce, Amy Singer, and Bahaeddin Yediyıldız have revealed the extensive public services that awqaf provided and the ways in which imperial ceremonies and other practices assisted the poor.

Our most detailed records of religious endowments are not available until the Mamluk period. However, for the era of the Fatimids, a Shi'ite dynasty that ruled Egypt from 969 to 1171, accounts of their ceremonial practices show how imperial largesse was extended to the populace at royal ceremonies, religious celebrations, and seasonal festivities.[22]

As Sabra shows, although the Mamluks' role in poor relief constituted primarily a safety net (rather than being a means to ameliorate poverty), the services they provided were extensive. In the capital of Cairo, Mamluk sultans established mosques, Sufi institutions, schools, and hospitals; they arranged the burial of the dead (during times of plague); and they attempted to implement price controls and distribute grain during times of scarcity. Endowments by the military elite included funds for the distribution of bread and water to the poor throughout the year.[23]

Building on the models and ideals of beneficence of prior Islamic rulers, Ottoman imperial religious endowments established by rulers, statesmen (administrators, governors, and important personages in various regions), and their families enabled the construction of buildings and the provisioning of services that benefited the general public as well as people who were identified as being particularly needy of assistance.[24] They funded the vast infrastructure necessary for commerce and trade as well as the very sanitation apparatuses of cities and towns. *Sabil*s (fountains), set along public thoroughfares, granted all who passed clean water and refreshment. Bridges were founded and maintained through religious endowments, as were waterworks. A key characteristic of these institutions was how in the words of Busbecq, they "helped not only everyone, but everyone equally."[25]

Caravansaries and Sufi lodges provided temporary shelter, a meal, and drinking water. Mosques were another example of a public institution that Ottoman rulers and statesmen founded and supported through religious endowments. These buildings served as more than places of worship; they also were places in which the weary could rest and wash. Attached to the more prominent and richly endowed mosques were vast complexes that housed charitable establishments such as soup kitchens, shelters, schools, and, in some cases, hospitals.

Mosque complexes, founded and maintained through religious endowments, were at the center of society, both physically and in terms of being a central point for the distribution for services. The Fatih mosque complex of Istanbul, established by Mehmed II (ruled 1444–46, 1451–81), illustrates the centrality of such an institution. In addition to serving as a place of worship, this complex initially housed the treasury (Bayt al-Mal) that allocated pensions to disabled soldiers and the widows and children of soldiers killed in combat. It also served as a distribution point for food and services to the needy and orphans in its most immediate neighborhood.[26]

Ottoman rulers, women of the royal family, and prominent officials not only endowed religious institutions such as mosques and Quran schools but also erected and supported Sufi lodges as a demonstration of their piety and religious commitments.[27] Given their asceticism and renouncement of material possessions, Sufis were referred to as "poor" (*faqir*; pl. *fuqara*) and were closely associated with poverty and mendicancy. They also helped care for the needy.[28] Sufi orders gave assistance to the poor in thirteenth-century Seljuq Anatolia, and in Ottoman Anatolia their lodges provided care for the mentally ill. In late-seventeenth-century Ottoman Egypt, Sufi orders managed hospitals that cared for the insane, the government—according to the Ottoman traveler Evliya Çelebi—having previously confiscated the funds that allowed these in-

stitutions to function.[29] Sufi lodges in Tunis gave assistance to the poor, serving as a distribution point for food and, in some instances, sheltering those who had no other means of support.[30] Those of nineteenth-century Egypt also functioned as shelters for impoverished nonmembers.[31] Although Sufi lodges continued to serve members and nonmembers during this period, the Egyptian government's use of the term *takiyya* to refer to state-run poorhouses reflects its appropriation of these lodges' traditional function.

With the exception of Sufi lodges, which were dispersed throughout the empire, the Ottomans' involvement in establishing religious endowments and extending care to the poor was largely confined to major urban cities or religious sites such as Istanbul, Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem. Istanbul, as the Ottoman capital, had extensive provisions that drew students as well as the poor to the city. In the seventeenth century Çelebi noted that having traveled in nineteen different dominions over the course of fifty-one years, he found that the *imaret* (soup kitchens) of this city were the best and most extensive he had seen anywhere. The poor were offered food three times a day at the Fatih imaret, and twice a day at imarets such as those of Sultan Bayezid, Khaseki Sultan, and Eyüp. In addition, "hundreds of kitchens" in various dervish lodges provided at least a loaf of bread and a bowl of soup to the poor.[32] Through the imaret system, as Halil Inalcık argues, the immense wealth concentrated in the hands of the ruling elite was redistributed among the poor.[33] But the strategic placement of institutions funded through religious endowments often meant that inhabitants in cities of lesser administrative or religious importance were denied access to imperially funded forms of relief. In provincial cities—for example, Aleppo in the eighteenth century—the poor could turn to their families and, to communal forms of charity and use other survival tactics such as begging or stealing, but the state's charity was conspicuous by its absence.[34]

The very act of feeding the poor was rife with symbolism associated with the Ottoman state. Following customs stemming from a Turkic and Persian heritage as well as Islamic traditions, during the month of Ramadan Ottoman rulers fed their subordinates at nightly *iftar* (dinners marking the end of the daily fast during Ramadan) and distributed (sometimes personally) food to the poor during the Id al-Adha. The soup kitchens that Ottoman rulers and their families established were a further extension of the patrimonial symbolism that suffused the very act of feeding the poor. Representing the means by which the sultan bestowed his benevolence on the poor, soup kitchens and ceremonies of food distribution served to strengthen the bonds between the ruler and his subjects.[35]

Principal urban areas, such as Cairo under Mamluk rule and Istanbul

or other important administrative centers in the Ottoman provinces, were also sites of other forms of benevolence. In Cairo the Mamluk sultans distributed food to the poor on religious holidays and at banquets celebrating the opening of institutions funded by religious endowments.[36] Ottoman sultans and administrators extended their benevolence to the populace during specific religious holidays and the celebrations that they staged to mark an ascension to the throne, victories in battle, or the birth or circumcision of a son. During Ottoman royal celebrations, the poor were not designated as the sole beneficiaries; rather food and money were distributed to all those in attendance, and the whole society had the opportunity to benefit from these displays of generosity.

In addition to imperial endowments, members of the Ottoman royal family, as Leslie Peirce has documented in her study of the imperial harem in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, might choose to allocate funds toward specific persons or purposes. Hence, alongside the foundation of soup kitchens or other endowments, for example, women of the royal family designated funds that would pay for the dowries of poor women.[37] Like other forms of royal largesse, each display of charity served multiple purposes: it represented the piety and beneficence of the person making the bequest, served the persons receiving the assistance, advertised the munificence of those in power, and functioned as a model for members of the elite.

As scholars have shown, in the case of the Mamluks and the Ottomans, the central state also administered specific funds for orphans, families of soldiers, and other people designated as deserving (*mustahiqqin*). The Mamluks created an orphans' depository (*mawdiʿ al-hukm*) to safeguard the inheritances of rich and poor orphans until they reached the age of discretion.[38] In the Ottoman context the treasury (Bayt al-Mal) provided funds to orphans and widows of soldiers.[39] The state was responsible for the distribution of assistance to the needy through the office of the treasury in later periods as well. As Kenneth Cuno has documented, in Ottoman Syria and Egypt one source of funds for the treasury was state land set aside as an endowment by a ruler or his deputies (*irsad*). This form of endowment differed from waqf in that it was not the sole property of the sovereign, nor could he or his family be the beneficiaries of the endowment. Rather, "the beneficiaries of an irsad must be chosen from among those activities, institutions and persons that are legitimately deserving of support (*al-mustahiqqun fi bayt al-mal*)."[40] Legal treatises specified institutions and people who were deemed legitimate beneficiaries. They included religious clerics, the poor, orphans, women, and widows. Mosque and tekke construction, their upkeep, and the salaries of those who performed religious duties were also included as legitimate targets of funding through irsad.[41] The

state treasury's stipends to those deemed deserving of charity and its compliance with definitions of *deservedness* grounded in religious doctrine, like the state's role in the establishment of other imperial awqaf, placed the state (as personified by the ruler) at the center of charitable giving.

Together with imperial forms of assistance, the multiple assistance options available to the needy in Islamic society constituted what has been described in Europe as a "mixed economy" of relief.[42] Such a range of options represented a perfect world of close connections between the ruler and his subjects, a wealth of endowments that provided for the destitute, social networks in which family, kin, and neighbors took care of their own, and ample alms for beggars who congregated in a town's or city's public areas. Yet in many cases this symbiosis of care remained only an ideal. Istanbul, for example, was richly endowed with imarets and other provisions of relief, but nevertheless not all of the poor received as warm a welcome as Thomas Thornton, the early-nineteenth-century visitor to the Ottoman Empire, described in his portrayal of Islamic charity in the Ottoman realms.[43] Systems of inclusion and exclusion meant that many were denied access to the very city space of Istanbul. The undesirable poor—specifically able-bodied men and men without networks or persons to vouch for their good behavior—were frequently expelled from the city.[44] Such practices of distinguishing between the sturdy poor and those deemed deserving of assistance were traditions that went back centuries, to the early Islamic period.[45] The presence of the undesirable poor in urban spaces was controlled through systems such as the *tezkere* (*tadhkira* in Arabic), a passport or document allowing a person to travel from one place to another.[46] Employment came only with sureties or within the structure of guilds; the unemployed who sought casual work were frequently denied access to the city. The very spaces of neighborhoods were also circumscribed to keep strangers out.

At the level of the family and kin networks, we also find silences and instances when practices did not measure up to ideals. Although we can surmise the means by which a family and neighbors cared for their indigent, documenting these actions of providing assistance is more difficult. Even more challenging is ascertaining the survival strategies of the most desperately needy, cut off from kin or family support. Poor women frequently resorted to the courts to be sure to obtain maintenance allowances that were their due.[47] Court records and other run-ins the poor had with the law (for theft, for example) are one means of finding information on poor people's efforts to get by.[48] Yet what of the invalids, the elderly, single women, and women with small children who had no networks of support and whose actions had not brought them

to the courts? To whom or what did desperate individuals who had no other means of assistance turn?

Finally, a further shortcoming in our understanding of poor relief in the Middle East stems from the nature of source materials on religious endowments. Religious endowments instructing how a soup kitchen was to feed the poor or listing the provisions made for a particular neighborhood's needy did not, unfortunately, include information beyond the *ideal* of poor relief. The information such records provide is limited to the services to be provided and the actions and goals of donors. Records of individual endowments—for example, Ottoman imaret—entail discussions of the day-to-day upkeep of the institution and the salaries of employees; but the poor who received sustenance from them remain anonymous. The circumstances of those who sought assistance, the ways in which the poor presented their requests for assistance, the means by which waqf administrators and other personnel prioritized among the needy and perhaps distinguished between the deserving and the undeserving poor, and the extent of care the poor received are all issues that are absent from historical scholarship on poor relief in the Middle East.

The Benevolence of the State

Thanks to the centralization efforts of Muhammad Ali's government and the governments of his successors (policies that included direct interventions in poor relief and efforts that built on the centralization processes of rulers before them),[49] we *do* have extensive information on one Ottoman province's practices of poor relief and the poor's use of state assistance. An analysis of the registers and documents of various state departments and institutions and an examination of the records and publications of associations active at the end of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century allow us to gain an understanding of features of poor relief and the experiences of the poor. These materials provide information on the circumstances of the poor, the delineation of the two categories of the deserving and the undeserving poor, the use of poorhouses to shelter the desperately poor, the means by which the indigent sought the state's (and, later, assocations') assistance, and the motivations of individuals (Egypt's rulers as well as private persons and groups) in providing poor relief.

It was within an environment of a religious tradition of charity that Egypt's government (a government based on a household elite comprising blood relatives, in-laws, freed slaves, and other close retainers)[50] established a series of institutions intended to provide for the poor and

needy of Cairo and other areas of the Ottoman Empire in the first half of the nineteenth century. As governor of Egypt, the attention Muhammad Ali gave to the indigent in this province could be seen to fall in line with the beneficence of other Ottoman rulers. And the construction of shelters and other means of caring for the poor had a long indigenous history in Egypt as well.[51] Many institutions funded by religious endowments were established and maintained in Cairo, a city that had served as the central locus of power since the Fatimid era.

The institutions established during the rule of Muhammad Ali, those that were introduced and maintained during the reigns of his successors, and the ongoing provisioning of assistance to Egypt's poor during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reflected numerous features that highlighted their religious nature. Individuals who were received into any one of these institutions — the poor shelters of Cairo and Alexandria, state-run hospitals, an orphanage and foundling home, and insane asylums — as records documenting their admission note, were admitted "out of the charity" or "out of the benevolence" (*ihsanan* or *min ihsanat*) of Egypt's ruler. The government's recognition of its obligations to the poor and needy, through the establishment and maintenance of a variety of facilities — facilities that supplemented or at times took the place of traditional structures such as religious endowments and the government's provisions for the needy through the Bayt al-Mal — illustrates that these institutions were founded within an Islamic rubric of attention to society's vulnerable members.

However, the Egyptian government's initiatives, although reflecting religious prerogatives, also featured aspects of a modern state apparatus.[52] Familial and community practices of assistance continued to exist, but alongside these forms of care, the state introduced and managed specialized institutions that sheltered the deserving poor (and helped enforce newly initiated restrictions on the public presence of the idle poor) and established specialized facilities such as hospitals and a foundling home and orphanage. The introduction of state-initiated poor-relief policies demonstrated new levels of bureaucratization (and hence depersonalization) via new and more interventionist means. In the urban centers of Cairo and Alexandria and throughout Egypt's provinces, the office of the Dabtiyya best represented this bureaucratization and the introduction of new levels of intervention. This office served as one of the points of intersection between the Egyptian populace and the state in terms of providing various kinds of poor relief. Its responsibilities in Cairo and Alexandria included applying government directives for the treatment of beggars and the insane who had been rounded up by the municipal authorities. Simultaneously, it served as a medium through which needy individuals sought the state's assistance. The individuals

requesting assistance presented their petitions to numerous offices of the state (including the Dabtiyya), hence giving the ruler — in reality — little or no contact with those on whom he bestowed his charity. At this juncture, the precise strategies and tactics of poor relief were centralized and secularized; a range of government-appointed personnel applied the government's new policies toward the poor.

Although these new interventions resulted in the appropriation of traditional forms of charity (as evidenced in, for example, terminology such as government-run shelters being labeled as *takiyya*) and the bureaucratization of care, they did not mean the entire displacement of other forms of assistance. Religious endowments such as al-Azhar continued to function as a site of food distribution to designated recipients. Families, neighborhoods, and — at least in the early part of the century — guilds continued to provide for their members. New government interventions, however, reflected, a growing concern about the public presence of the poor, new, and increasingly centralized ways of clearing the streets of the idle poor, and, by the beginning of the twentieth century, a new role for the elite in caring for those deemed Egypt's most vulnerable members.[53]

The Poor in the Public Eye

"In our cities, and especially in Cairo and Alexandria," remarked Kamel Greiss to an audience attending his presentation before the Sultanic Society of Political Economy, Statistics, and Legislation in 1916, "the streets and public spaces are cluttered with the infirm, the crippled, children in rags, and the unemployed, all with outstretched hands." The blind people one encountered, like mothers with small children who beseeched passersby to give them alms and the entire range of beggars who pleaded for assistance, were, in Greiss's view, impostors. Mendicancy in Egypt, as he explained to his audience, had become a true profession.[54]

Greiss's perspectives on begging were not unique. European travelers to Egypt commented on beggars who had amassed fortunes thanks to the charity of sympathetic inhabitants. Visitors to Istanbul also remarked that, for the most part, beggars were primarily "religious impostors" who could easily subsist thanks to the kindness of the urban populace. Even as far back as the first centuries of Islam, city authorities attempted to distinguish the deserving poor from those who feigned illness or destitution so as to solicit alms. In other eras and Middle Eastern locales, the presence of beggars had been termed a public nuisance as well as a potential threat to public order and security.

Nearly a century before Greiss's calls for denial of assistance to "impostors," the public presence of Egypt's poor had been a source of consternation for Egypt's government. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Muhammad Ali and city officials had expressed frustration over the large number of peasants fleeing from the countryside to, among other places, Cairo and Alexandria. In this period, the government initiated intensive efforts to expel nonresident beggars from the city and introduced ways to distinguish between the able-bodied and the deserving poor. Labor demands—stemming from efforts to maintain agricultural monopolies and to establish industry and due to the engagement of Muhammad Ali's armies in Greater Syria—and the need to direct government expenditures and manpower toward this occupation and hostilities with Mahmud II—resulted in a new official intolerance for religious mendicants as well as other beggars.

Concern about appearances and issues of public health, order, and security was a further reason for the government's comments on the presence of beggars in Cairo's streets and public spaces. By the time of Ismail's reign, when increasing numbers of Europeans were arriving in Egypt, the government had issued numerous calls for the removal of the poor from the streets and markets of cities such as Cairo and Alexandria. In each instance, institutions in existence, such as Takiyyat Tulun and Takiyyat Qabbari (in Alexandria) were mentioned as possible places in which the poor could be cared for and hence kept out of the public eye. Simultaneous to this era, as well as in decades preceding Ismail's rule, references to the itinerant poor included discussions of issues of public health and, in some instances, public security. Regarding order (*dabt wa rabt*) and security, the authorities of Cairo and Alexandria, like Istanbul authorities, were most concerned about loitering and the public presence of unemployed but able-bodied men. Government decrees set forth regulations as to what to do with these individuals. Forced employment and military training were just two options that the government initiated in an attempt to clear the streets of those who were deemed potentially troublesome or dangerous.

Beggars' seemingly unfettered existence in Cairo's public spaces was also a topic object for comment and concern for foreigners residing in or traveling through Egypt during this era. In many ways, parts of my analysis of the poor and the state's actions are mediated through the sometimes sympathetic but often condemnatory comments of Westerners residing in Egypt. In many cases, the official stance of their home governments vis-à-vis Muhammad Ali (the British were belligerent, and the French more conciliatory) colored their perceptions as well as their portrayal of conditions in Egypt. As Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot has warned us in her analysis of portrayals of Muhammad Ali, we must be

mindful of how particular biases led to misrepresentations of his rule and policies.[55]

Given these portrayals' political nature (these descriptions were intended to represent Egypt in a way that served imperial ends), we need to be attentive to Western travelers' potential for exaggeration and misrepresentation. However, as long as we recognize their intended political import, we can make use of the descriptions of Egypt that they provide. Leaving aside the "fantastic" and utilizing descriptions that corroborate other sources allows us to present a more vivid picture of Egypt's social history. At the same time, by analyzing these sources' intended impact on European audiences we can see how certain representations of Egypt's poor fulfilled imperial objectives.

Egypt's importance to the Ottoman Empire and new trade initiatives in the first decades of the nineteenth century, its integration into the world economy, and specifically its increasing strategic importance in the second half of the century brought growing numbers of foreigners to Egypt. Tourists (thanks to steamships and the opening of the Suez Canal) joined diplomats, military officials, merchants, and entrepreneurs resident in Egypt during this era. They commented on the conditions of Egypt's poor as well as on the public presence of beggars. These various groups of outsiders frequently remarked on the large number of beggars they saw, as well as the ease with which beggars were able to subsist on the charity of Cairo's inhabitants. But of equal importance in their discussion of the public presence of beggars were remarks on how the conditions of Egypt's poor were indicative of the despotic government of Muhammad Ali (as well as his successors) and the Egyptian government's inability (and disinterest) in providing for the poor. Such tropes of Egypt's poverty and the topos of the government's lack of regard for the poor (as well as, later in the nineteenth century, accusations that indigenous private persons neglected their obligations toward them) were key features of foreigners' perceptions of Egypt. During the first decades of the British occupation (1882–1922), British medical authorities as well as journalists argued that Egyptians' disregard of their own poor and their inability to care for their impoverished citizens indicated that British expertise was crucial in public health and social welfare and that Egyptians were not ready for independence from British rule.

The practice of poor relief in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reflected a hybridity. Government efforts represented a melding of different religious traditions and simultaneously spoke to Egypt's unique placement at the crossroads of a series of empires.[56] Egypt's traditions of poor relief were grounded in Islamic practices and an Islamic ethos of caring for the poor, but state involvement in this realm also

reflected Ottoman influences. Finally, European actors (advisers, outside observers, and colonial officials), through their proposals, their critiques, and, by the end of the nineteenth century, their programs, influenced the very shape of poor relief.

Managing the Poor

The initiation of direct state intervention in poor relief during this period in Egypt differed markedly from policies in other times and locales of the Middle East. From secondary research addressing policies toward the poor in the contexts of Mamluk Egypt (1250–1517), eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Tunis, and eighteenth-century Aleppo and secondary sources and available archival materials for seventeenth-through nineteenth-century Istanbul, we learn that city officials did not implement broad-scale practices of arresting and interning the poor. In each region, begging was an accepted feature of society. City officials in Istanbul did not make extensive efforts to clear the streets of the poor until the 1890s. Direct state involvement in poor relief, centralized institutions and apparatuses of record keeping which kept track of the poor's involvement with the state, and the broad-scale implementation of restrictions on the public presence of the poor set Egypt apart from other areas. In some respects, practices in Egypt came closer to those of Western Europe and Russia. At the same time, the continued religious ethos that pervaded state involvement in poor relief distinguished Egypt's initiatives from those of countries such as France and England.

   In the process of documenting the initiation of direct state involvement in poor relief and charting transformations in state and private initiatives of charity over the course of the nineteenth century, this book posits that poor-relief practices in Egypt did not fit neatly into a distinct rubric of social control.[57] Despite the introduction of restrictions on poor people's public presence and increasing interventions in their lives, the word *policing* is not an apt description of policies implemented in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for the state and private organizations were incapable of entirely controlling the poor. The conjuring of an apparatus of control that *policing* implies, furthermore, fails to capture how benevolence was in great part religiously inspired. Nor was the state's and private organizations' *provisioning* of assistance to the poor inexhaustible and unrestricted. The establishment of priorities in provisioning resulted in the forging of distinctions between the sturdy poor and those deemed "deserving" of assistance. The idleness of the able-bodied poor (predominantly men) served as a justification for punishments ranging from forced employment to transportation. Fi-

nally, poor relief was neither unilaterally determined nor unilaterally imposed. The *intent* of the state and private philanthropists differed from the *outcome* and *effect* of their actions.[58] Furthermore, the requests the poor made for assistance influenced the shape and scope of assistance. In sum, the state (through its agents in the Dabtiyya) and well-intentioned philanthropic groups active in Egypt from the end of the nineteenth century onward *managed* the poor. They implemented policies, introduced plans (frequently positing these programs within a religious discourse of care for the poor), and succeeded in providing a range of assistance. But inadequate resources and a certain measure of inefficacy meant that they could not completely regulate or control the public poor.

That Egypt's rulers and philanthropists had a difficult time fully implementing poor-relief projects is understandable given the failings of their northern neighbors in this same realm. Studies of poor relief in Europe have illustrated the difficulties that numerous governmental agencies and private bodies encountered as they sought to impose restrictions on the itinerant poor. This scholarship also demonstrates that social-control models are insufficient explanatory modes of analysis, for they represent only the intent of poor-relief officials, for example, and not the outcomes of their endeavors. In England application of the poor law varied depending on local circumstances, and workhouses never resembled Benthamite panopticons. Due to new policies, some people might have been categorized as marginal or deviant, but the assumption that these practices were geared solely toward social control does not account for the relief that families felt when, unable to care for a dangerously insane relative, they committed him or her to a state-funded institution. Nor does the assumption that such policies were all-pervasive explain how the "quiet" insane continued to evade confinement due to a lack of space. Sunday schools, rather than being the preserve of outsiders and a means of imposing middle-class values and ideas of deference to authority on the British working classes, were run by members of working-class communities and promoted self-help and advancement through merit.[59]

To truly understand poor-relief practices in the contexts of North America, Western Europe, and Russia, we need only look at the more nuanced and detailed studies that have emerged. These works explore the economic and social goals of the administrators and statesmen who shaped poor-relief policies and examine the successes and failures of their objectives. For example, in her exploration of the application of the poor law in nineteenth-century England, Lynn Lees documents the operation of poorhouses and how the poor utilized these institutions and viewed the actions of officials charged with administering the poor

law. She also shows how local decisions and administrators' actions affected the functioning of workhouses. Administrators frequently did not enforce the purported discipline and punishment the workhouse was intended to introduce. Although workhouses were intended as a means to stigmatize the poor, at times the most destitute, lacking other means of assistance, considered the workhouse as a viable (and often temporary) solution and not an institution to be avoided at all costs.[60]

Cultural norms and predominant attitudes toward the poor could also impede the implementation of restrictive policies. As Adele Lindenmeyr illustrates, imperial Russia's experiments in poor relief were distinct from those of Western Europe due to cultural differences. Giving aid to the needy was ingrained in Russian culture, and the recognition that "poverty was not a vice" was pervasive. Despite reformers' efforts to secularize poor relief, cultural attitudes toward poverty and charity and tolerance toward begging prevented government authorities from enforcing restrictions on the public presence of beggars.

Works that closely examine how the poor took advantage of assistance options serve as a further critique of social-control models. Contributors to *The Uses of Charity*, Peter Mandler's edited volume, discuss how the poor actively sought the assistance of the state, navigating through a variety of resources and presenting their cases in ways in which they could best benefit from the sympathies of poor-relief officials. Just as contributors to this edited volume document the agency of the poor, Rachel Fuchs's analysis of impoverished unmarried pregnant women in nineteenth-century Paris recovers the voices and actions of women whose experiences have remained outside the historical record. Utilizing court documents about women accused of abortion and infanticide, she analyzes the absence of options available to single, poor, and pregnant women, the motivations behind the choices they made, and the ways in which they procured assistance.

Other scholarship on poor relief in Western countries has attempted to contextualize the rise of the welfare state, documenting the extent to which demands from those in need of assistance and the activities of philanthropists helped shape emerging institutions. In this line, the work of Theda Skocpol sets discussions of Civil War pensions and aid for women and children within Progressive Era politics and contingencies.[61] A "maternalist welfare state," with female-dominated public agencies implementing regulations and extending assistance to women and children, came into being. Contributors to Seth Koven and Sonya Michel's *Mothers of a New World* also show how maternalist discourses were used to fashion welfare policies. Women activists, couching their demands within a maternalist rhetoric, made demands on the state that influenced political policy and ensured a space for themselves (as social

workers and in health care fields) within emergent institutions. As authors in this edited volume show, the formation of welfare policies was predicated upon the actions of numerous actors.[62]

Nor did "welfare institutions" in the West ever develop along a linear trajectory. Two recently edited volumes, *The Locus of Care* and *Medicine and Charity before the Welfare State*, call into question the delineation between familial forms of charity and the "rise" of the welfare state. They argue that there never was a "golden age" of the family, nor was there a time when state-funded relief was paramount. Contributors to *The Locus of Care* document how multiple forms of assistance have always existed side by side. Even separating "state" charity from "private" forms of assistance, as the essays in *Medicine and Charity before the Welfare State* illustrate, is impossible. In Western Europe, the church and the state frequently subsidized "private" charities. The central government and political parties also often chose to promote some charities at the expense of others for their own political ends.[63]

The questions that these scholars of poor relief in the West have posed of their research materials and the means by which they have contributed to our understanding of poor relief and state-society relations have, in turn, enriched my analysis of the initiation of more interventionist forms of poor relief, the development of state-run charitable institutions in Egypt, and the rise of philanthropic organizations. Like Fahmy's book on the Egyptian army in which he illustrates the failure of many "disciplining" projects, I acknowledge the allure of social-control models.[64] But I also recognize that calls for the prohibition of begging and the confinement of beggars, and private philanthropists' efforts to promote vocational training and enforce respectability among Egypt's street children, remained but blueprints in terms of their successful enactment. Beggars continued to be a constant presence in public spaces, poorhouses in Egypt (like those in Europe and North America) had insufficient space and resources, and philanthropists' vocational training centers were more frequently used by families who enrolled their children in these institutions than by the street children such institutions sought to reform. Despite their intended goal of removing potentially criminal boys and girls from the streets of Cairo and Alexandria, juvenile "vagrants" remained a public presence.[65]

Our understanding of Egypt's social history must take into account the actions of the poor themselves, and not only the means by which they were acted upon. Although on one hand we can explore state-initiated plans for clearing the streets of beggars and how such projects involved the establishment of poor shelters and other attempts to restrict the public presence of the poor, on the other hand we must look at poor people's *use* of these facilities and how they learned to negotiate

through the various bureaucratic offices established at this time. We must also examine how the poor portrayed their poverty and need to state officials as well as to private philanthropists. As contributors to Mandler's collection *The Uses of Charity* seek to understand, how did the poor present themselves so as to best take advantage of services and the sympathy of those who provided assistance? How, as scholars contributing to *Medicine and Charity before the Welfare State* ask, did the poor use charity for purposes for which it might not have been intended?

In books on poor relief in the contexts of Western Europe, Russia, and North America, we find many points of similarity in the practices and the development of services. Like institutions in Europe, the state's involvement in charity in Egypt did not proceed along a linear track. Familial, community, and traditional forms of assistance operated alongside new, state-run institutions. The centrality of the poor to the state changed depending on the economic and political conditions of Egypt, and the demands of the poor overwhelmed the state's capacity to provide for them. As in Europe, multiple options for care existed. Poor people's first line of defense was their families, but even their receipt of some forms of state assistance (that is, admission to government-run shelters) did not cut them off entirely from their loved ones. Although at the outset state-run shelters in Egypt were designed to punish beggars (by restricting their access to private charity, casual labor, and their freedom of movement), the poor of Egypt *sought* admission to shelters, considering it just one among many options for care. Like the poor of nineteenth-century England and eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Antwerp, many of the poor who requested admission to shelters in Egypt made use of government facilities for only short periods of time.[66]

The cultural aspect of Egypt's experiences with poor relief was similar to that of imperial Russia. In both locales, a religious ethos of care for the poor permeated charitable practices.[67] As in Russia, the inability of Egypt's state officials to enforce prohibitions on begging might very well have been due to private persons' continued tolerance of the poor. In both Egypt and Russia, religious obligations also underlay the motivations of philanthropic associations established at the end of the nineteenth century.

Developments in poor relief and attitudes toward the poor in Egypt, as in Western Europe, Russia, and North America, were contingent upon transformations in the economy and the changing ability of the state to respond to the needs of the poor. Simultaneously, the actions of well-intentioned philanthropists also set the perimeters of forms of assistance. As in North America and Western Europe, associations, many of which included prominent women, called for the implementation of

programs to ameliorate the conditions of the poor. The targets of such organizations, as in the other regions, were society's most vulnerable people: women and children. What differed from the development of welfare provisions in the Western world, however, was the colonial component of Egypt's experiences with poor relief. Many associations came into being in response to interventions by missionaries and foreign groups, and they frequently equated care for the poor with nationalist ideals.

Transformations in Poor Relief

State-sponsored shelters functioned in only two urban areas of Egypt, Cairo and Alexandria. In addition to the lack of any mention of such facilities in rural or other urban areas of Egypt, the presence of indigent people from outside of Cairo and Alexandria who gained admission to these shelters confirms that these four institutions (the Maristan—also referred to as Mahall al-Fuqara', Takiyyat Tulun, Qishla al-Sadaqa, and Takiyyat Qabbari) were all that existed. Like Istanbul, whose imaret were a draw for the empire's poor, many needy people from outside these cities came to Cairo and Alexandria and petitioned for admission, noting that they had no other means of support. Their requests for admission might well have followed other attempts to obtain a livelihood by begging in the cities. Unlike poor-relief programs in Europe, which stipulated that poor persons could receive aid only in their home districts, the poor shelters in Cairo and Alexandria did not make such distinctions. As long as individuals could prove their deserving status (for example, by demonstrating their inability to work and provide for themselves and by proving that they had no other means of support), they would be considered eligible for state charity.

The state's ability to assist the poor, however, was limited. As early as the 1830s, the government imposed its own criteria of deservedness on the poor whom the police had arrested on Cairo's streets and markets. As described in chapter 2, those who were able to work were put to work, and those deemed "unfit" were admitted to the state-run shelter located in the Maristan Qalawun. Confining the poor was never absolute. Once confined to these shelters, beggars could gain release if they met a number of conditions. As discussed extensively in chapter 3, family members and the relatives of beggars petitioned for the release of their kin, vouching for the beggars' good behavior and providing guarantees that the beggars would not engage in this activity again.

By the 1850s, shelter officials also had to deny admission to other individuals who requested shelter. Those deemed healthy were consid-

ered ineligible. And those who wished to become permanent residents of Takiyyat Tulun, Cairo's second poor shelter, could not stay unconditionally. Shelter administrators frequently screened residents and determined who would be allowed to continue residing in the shelter and who would be expelled. In many instances, individuals who had been expelled subsequently requested readmission, attempting to prove yet again that they deserved state assistance.

Poor shelters established in Egypt differed from similar facilities in Europe. Unlike the workhouses of England, for example, they were not intended to enforce strictures of less-eligibility, nor were they designed to inculcate an appreciation for work. On only one occasion did I find evidence that the poor within the walls of Takiyyat Tulun were to be put to work (during the reign of Khedive Ismail).[68] However, this project to create a *workhaus* was never implemented. The four Egyptian poorhouses were distinctly charitable in that they were intended to provide food and shelter to individuals who had no other recourse for care. The poor housed in these institutions could leave, and many did leave: they fled, were released through the intercession of family and kin, or proved to shelter administrators that they were capable of caring for themselves and promised that they would not return to begging. In many ways, Egypt's poor shelters were a temporary home for the indigent. In some instances, the poor made these institutions their permanent residence.

The poor were never absent from the public eye. Throughout accounts of this era, we see that they were a source of frustration for city authorities who sought to remove them from public spaces, and they were an object of charity and sometimes of criticism, for private persons and charitable organizations alike. Chapter 4, "The Spectacle of the Poor," focuses on the fact that the very spectacle of the poor was politically charged. For Westerners, the poor's ubiquitous public presence and the supposed inadequacy of poor-relief institutions and insane asylums at the beginning of the nineteenth century demonstrated the despotism of Egypt's rulers. In the second half of the nineteenth century and later, their public presence indicated not only the negligence of Egypt's rulers but also the Egyptian elite's lack of concern for the indigent and the "need" for Western nations to teach Egyptians how to care for their own poor.

The state's overall abilities to provide for the poor diminished by the end of the century. Upon the closing of Takiyyat Tulun (to protect and preserve this important monument of Islamic art and architecture), the shelters that replaced it were smaller, with a combined capacity of just over three hundred persons, unlike the nearly five hundred who could be housed in Takiyyat Tulun (figures 1.1 and 1.2 depict Ahmad ibn Tulun Mosque when it was used as a shelter in the 1860s and as it
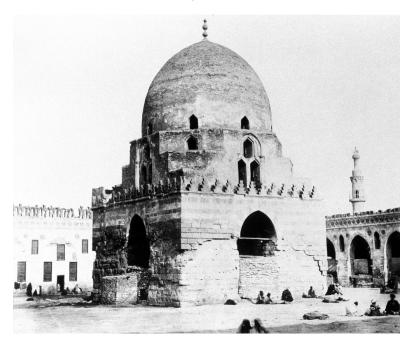
Figure 1.1. This photograph shows the Mosque of Ahmad ibn Tulun when it served as a shelter for the poor, circa 1860s. (Courtesy of the Iverson Collection)

appeared in the 1980s).[69] In addition, the priorities of the Egyptian government during the British occupation also affected the state's involvement in poor relief. Whereas public health concerns and the medical aspects of charity continued to be a priority, assistance to the truly destitute received less governmental attention. At the same time, more restrictive prohibitions were imposed on able-bodied beggars. These restrictions, which targeted chiefly vagrant men (considered sturdy men who were capable of working), included punishments as harsh as imprisonment or transportation.

During this era, as I illustrate in chapter 5, "The Future of the Nation," associations entered the field of poor relief. Their activities point to how a particular cause, namely ameliorating the conditions of Egypt's poor children, became a rallying point that brought different individuals together with a common goal. A second feature of these associations was that instead of giving assistance for the sake of charity alone, they began to focus on assisting the poor in obtaining viable means of employment. Programs initiated by these organizations—projects that the government replicated in later years—centered primarily on industrial and vocational training for boys, but they also included
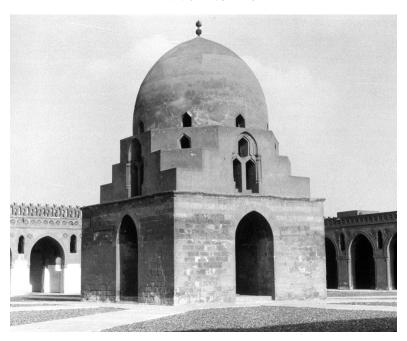
Figure 1.2. By 1880 the Mosque of Ahmad ibn Tulun ceased to be used as a shelter for the poor. During the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth, extensive restoration work was completed. The repairs and restoration have erased any traces of its use as a shelter. (Courtesy of the Iverson Collection, 1985)

opportunities for girls to gain skills for employment. A third aspect of the advent of associations was the politicization of poverty and the ways in which associations and individuals, although directing their efforts toward charitable ends, made use of the poor for political purposes.

The rise of charitable associations in late-nineteenth-century Egypt stemmed from the convergence of the inadequacy of state-sponsored services, a collective threat felt in communities, the emergence of an educated elite, and the availability of forums and means of communication (such as the press) through which an organization could advertise its actions and efforts and solicit funds. The conjuncture of these various factors was similar to the one that gave rise to associations at the center of the Ottoman Empire. There, a period of political turmoil and revolution concurred with the development of civil society and the subsequent creation of political organizations and associations.[70] In Istanbul the bestowal of charity was itself politicized as Sultan Abdul Hamid

II pitted himself against associations in an effort to prove his ability to care for the poor.[71] In the case of Egypt, despite charitable goals, philanthropic organizations (as well as other associations founded during this period) also represented a threat to Egypt's monarchy. Egypt's government attempted to temper the emergence of civil society (as represented by the associational movement active since the last decades of the nineteenth century) through a variety of means.[72]

Even though the charitable projects of numerous associations were ostensibly geared toward the amelioration of the conditions of the poor, the Egyptian government, as early as the 1920s, sought to make sure that the aims of these groups were solely charitable. Each organization was required to demonstrate that it was not in any way involved in politics. Such concern became increasingly acute from the 1930s on as the government sought to curtail the activities of communist groups who were likely to agitate among the poor. A second source of anxiety was the activities of the Muslim Brotherhood, whose projects were geared toward improving the lives of the poor.

From the 1920s on, Egypt's monarch and politicians recognized the political import of the poor and became involved in poor relief at various levels so as to counter the activities of associations and organizations engaging in charitable activities. At one level, they instituted surveillance over the activities of philanthropic organizations. At the same time, they endeavored to advertise their own concern for the poor. The Ministry of Social Affairs, established in 1939, assumed surveillance of the activities of all associations active during this period. Simultaneously, this ministry also sought to detract attention from the activities of private associations by placing King Farouk, Egypt's ruler, at the center of numerous benevolence projects. As Nancy Gallagher has argued, competition between the king and various political parties drew the poor into a public discourse during the Second World War. In this era, politicians vied with one another in the press and advertised their philanthropic activities among the rural poor, to prove their benevolence and ability to best address the needs of Egypt's poor.[73]

In the first decades of the twentieth century, the politics of benevolence had come to mean the forms and scope of competition between Europeans and Egyptians as to who was best suited to care for Egypt's poor. But the politics of benevolence also entailed competition among Egypt's own elites and politicians, with each drawing attention to the poor and to ameliorating poverty. The various actors on the field of poor relief put the poor in full public view so as to advertise their own abilities to care for them and in this manner lay claim to their own political legitimacy.

The extent to which charitable associations could assist the poor, cou-

pled with the increased difficulties the poor faced during the Depression and the Second World War, as I emphasize in chapter 6, "Conclusion: From 'the Poor' to 'Poverty,'" made poverty and discussions of the means to ameliorate it topics of political debate. During the 1940s and on, political parties and the king competed with one another to prove their abilities to care for the poor.